DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 828 PS 029 307

AUTHOR	Harrington, Mary
TITLE	Evaluation of Free To Grow, Phase II: Detailed Profile of the Free To Grow Project in California. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Mathematica Policy Research, Princeton, NJ.
SPONS AGENCY	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, NJ.
REPORT NO	MPR-8743-002
PUB DATE	2001-02-00
NOTE	53p.
CONTRACT	RWJ-38187-18
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications Department, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., P.O. Box 2393, Princeton, NJ 08543-2393 (Document no. PR01-14, $3.40). Tel: 609-799-3535; Fax: 609-799-0005. For full text: http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/PDFs/ftgcaprofile.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Change; Community Cooperation; *Community Involvement; Demonstration Programs; Models; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Prevention; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; *School Community Relationship; *Substance Abuse
IDENTIFIERS	California (Compton); Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

The Free to Grow pilot project, developed by the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science and its Head Start project, operated between 1994 and 1999. Following a 2-year planning and development stage, 5 project sites went on to complete the 3-year implementation phase in California, Colorado, Kentucky, New York, and Puerto Rico; the Compton, California site is detailed in this profile. The project's goal was to prevent substance abuse problems by reducing risks and enhancing protecting factors at the family and community levels. Through a community-wide coalition and safe space task forces based in schools and Head Start centers, parents and other residents developed leadership skills and worked to improve the physical, social, and cultural environment of their neighborhoods and schools. Groups of parent and youth advocates promoted project efforts and substance abuse prevention. Project accomplishments included persuading local police to establish Drug-Free School Zones, graffiti removal programs, school watch patrols, and stronger enforcement of local ordinances governing storefront advertising of alcohol and tobacco products. The project experience provided several lessons about the challenges of conducting substance abuse prevention and community building within a stressed environment. The model used was conceptually strong, rooted in substance abuse prevention theory and connected to parents of young children. Although the project demonstrated success in grassroots organizing, it lacked relationship- and consensus-building skills necessary to overcome major obstacles in the community and the Head Start/grantee environment, such as school performance problems, tensions between blacks and Latinos, and leadership changes and performance problems at the Head Start level. Notable successes included the development of a self-sustaining task force, significant school changes, the provision of a mechanism for parental

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

support, and strong ties with the local police department. (Appended is a chart detailing the logic model for California's Free to Grow Project.) (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 463 828

Contract No.: RWJ-38187-18
MPR Reference No.: 8743-002

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research, Inc.

Evaluation of Free to Grow, Phase II: Detailed Profile of the Free to Grow Project in California

Final Report

February 2001

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Don F. Lara
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Mary Harrington

PS 029307

Submitted to:

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Route 1 and College Road East
P.O. Box 2316
Princeton, NJ 08543-2316

Project Officer:
Tracy Orleans

Submitted by:

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
P.O. Box 2393
Princeton, NJ 08543-2393
(609) 799-3535

Project Director:
Irma Perez-Johnson

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Development of this report would not have been possible without substantial help from many people. Special appreciation goes to the Free to Grow grantee and project staff in Compton, California, especially Phillipa Johnson, Linda Rahman, Kerry English, Harry Douglas, Kalem Aquil, Armando Lopez, and Carliss Norwood-Womack. On numerous occasions, they willingly and graciously took time from their busy schedules to meet with the evaluation team, provide written documents, and share insights about the program and lessons learned. Participating parents and Free to Grow partners and collaborators also provided valuable input during site visit interviews and focus groups.

At Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR), Irma Perez-Johnson, Alicia Meckstroth, and John Love participated in site visits and provided valuable guidance and insights throughout all phases of the work. Andrew Samson assisted in the Phase I site visits, and David Eden supported the focus groups conducted during Phase II. Walt Brower carefully edited the document, and Marjorie Mitchell and Monica Capizzi-Linder expertly produced it.

At The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, we are grateful to the evaluation Project Officer, Tracy Orleans, for her guidance and leadership throughout the evaluation. Marjorie Gutman, the Foundation Program Officer, along with Judy Jones and Lori Levine from the Free to Grow National Program Office, also shared valuable information and insights.

The author appreciates these many contributions, as well as others that may have been omitted unintentionally.

CONTENTS

	Page
A. THE NATIONAL FREE TO GROW DEMONSTRATION	2
B. THE LOCAL CONTEXT FOR THE COMPTON FREE TO GROW PROJECT	4
1. The Community	4
2. The Grantee and Its Head Start Project	7
C. DREW HEAD START'S FREE TO GROW MODEL	9
1. Overview and Theory of Change	10
2. Staffing and Project Oversight	11
3. Model Components	12
4. Support from Free to Grow Staff	23
5. Partnerships	24
6. Capacity Building Through Training and Technical Assistance	27
D. IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE	28
1. Changes in the Model Over Time	28
2. Expansion	29
3. Integration into Head Start	30
4. Sustaining the Work	30
E. PERCEIVED CHANGES IN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES	31
1. Changes in Families	33
2. Changes in the Community	33
F. VALUE ADDED TO HEAD START	34
G. LESSONS TO GUIDE FUTURE EFFORTS	35
1. Promising Program Practices and Facilitating Factors	36
2. Key Challenges	39
3. Advice for Future Programs	40
ATTACHMENT A: A LOGIC MODEL FOR CALIFORNIA'S FREE TO GROW PROJECT	43

TABLES

Table		Page
1	The Free to Grow Target Community Compton, California, Free to Grow Project	5
2	Free to Grow Community-Strengthening Components Free to Grow Project in Compton, California	13
3	Free to Grow Partners and Collaborators Free to Grow Project in Compton, California	25
4	Changes in Families and Communities Reported by Free to Grow Staff, Partners, and Participating Parents, Free to Grow Project in Compton, California	32
5	Factors Influencing the Free to Grow Experience Free to Grow Project in Compton, California	37

This document profiles the Free to Grow project developed by the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science and its Head Start project. Building on a strong foundation of family-based programming, Drew University's substance abuse prevention approach focused on promoting changes at the community level. The model was guided by two important principles: (1) to build on the strengths of community rather than focus on its weaknesses, and (2) to promote lasting change through a process of civic organizing. Civic organizing, similar in some respects to community organizing, focuses on building strong relationships between citizens and business and political leaders, and on promoting greater citizen participation in local governance and politics. In general, the civic organizing approach favors building skills and encouraging residents to work "within the system," over confrontational approaches that pit one group against another.

The program's slogan, "Children Deserve a Safe Space Somewhere on this Planet," captures in compelling simplicity the spirit of the Compton effort. Through a communitywide coalition and safe space task forces based in schools and Head Start centers, parents and other residents developed leadership skills and worked to improve the physical, social, and cultural environment of some of the toughest neighborhoods and schools in the country. Groups of parent advocates and youth advocates promoted project efforts and substance abuse prevention. Accomplishments included persuading local police to establish Drug-Free School Zones, graffiti removal programs, and school watch patrols; getting crosswalks and speed bumps installed near schools; and bringing about stronger enforcement of local ordinances governing storefront advertising of alcohol and tobacco products.

The pilot program began in May 1994 and ended in April 1999. Overall, Drew Head Start's Free to Grow experience provides many lessons about the challenges of conducting substance abuse prevention and community building within a stressed environment. The Drew Free to Grow model

is quite strong conceptually, rooted firmly in substance abuse prevention theory and strongly connected to parents of young children. However, while the pilot project continually demonstrated success in grassroots organizing, it lacked the relationship- and consensus-building skills necessary to overcome major obstacles in the community and the Head Start/grantee environment. At the community level, major performance problems within the school district, as well as tensions between blacks and Latinos, made Free to Grow work all the more important but also much more difficult. Other serious obstacles involved leadership changes and serious performance problems at the grantee and Head Start level. Despite these challenges, there were many notable successes. One of the task forces became self-sustaining, brought about significant changes in the school, and provided a mechanism for member parents to support each other during difficult times. The project also formed strong ties with the local police department, which helped bring new services and a strong sense of citizen-police partnership to the community.

A. THE NATIONAL FREE TO GROW DEMONSTRATION

In 1994, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation launched a five-year, $5.4 million pilot program involving six Head Start grantees to design and develop "model substance abuse prevention projects that will strengthen both the families and neighborhoods of economically disadvantaged preschool children."[1] Following a two-year planning and development phase (Phase I), five projects went on to complete the three-year implementation phase (Phase II). The initiative, named Free to Grow, targeted families and neighborhoods of Head Start children to create changes that would *free* young children *to grow* and flourish, while protecting them from substance abuse and its associated problems. The five Phase II Free to Grow pilot projects were scattered across the United States and

[1] From the Request for Applications for Free to Grow from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

included sites in (1) Compton, California; (2) Colorado Springs, Colorado; (3) Owensboro, Hancock County, and Christian County, Kentucky; (4) the Washington Heights section of New York City, New York; and (5) the San Isidro ward of Canóvanas, Puerto Rico.

Free to Grow builds on a growing body of research that recognizes the importance of family and neighborhood characteristics in raising or lowering the risk that someone will become a substance abuser. At the family level, factors that have been shown to increase the chances that children will experience poor health and developmental outcomes include alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use among family members, poor relationships and limited bonding among family members, domestic violence, and permissive or excessively punitive discipline. In addition, neighborhood characteristics, such as concentrated and extreme poverty, high crime rates, prevalence of drug dealing and ATOD sales to minors, and community norms that are permissive of drug and alcohol use have been shown to increase a child's vulnerability.

Most prevention research and program strategies have focused on adolescence, when substance abuse and its concomitant problems begin to appear. With concerns about trends toward initiation of alcohol and drug use at earlier ages, and heightened awareness of factors that contribute to healthy development in the earliest years, researchers and program developers are starting to look more closely at the developmental pathways of substance abuse in early childhood. Through Free to Grow, the Foundation hoped to break new ground by developing and testing comprehensive prevention models that focused on early childhood. Head Start, the nation's premier child development and family support program, was a natural partner in this initiative because of its work with vulnerable children and families, its focus on comprehensive and community-based strategies, and its presence in more than 2000 communities across the nation.

The Foundation contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., to evaluate the model development and implementation process. The evaluation, a process study conducted in two phases, gathered information through site visits, telephone interviews, focus groups, and the review of grant applications and other documents produced by the projects. The evaluation also drew upon documents from the Free to Grow National Program Office (NPO), housed at the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, which was responsible for monitoring the projects and providing training and technical assistance.

B. The Local Context for the Compton Free to Grow Project

1. The Community

Infamous as the home of "gangster rap," Compton is part of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, with a population of more than 90,000. The city has experienced rapid population growth and dramatic demographic change during the past 20 years. Since 1980, the proportion of black residents in the city has declined from 74 to 48 percent, while the Latino population has more than doubled,

Local Residents Talk About Problems Facing Children and Families

"When I first arrived in Compton, the situation was very different....As time has passed, the Latino community has grown and blacks have moved to other areas. The legacy we have is a community in disorganization, with much delinquency."

"A big problem is the poverty in Latino families, the families we see in this city. There are few programs to help us, few that we know. Parents are not organized and don't know the role they need to play in this community. The low quality of education and the lack of control in the schools also contributes; drugs are easily sold in them. Teachers, administrators, staff, the district, the police, parents are not sufficiently involved, are not working together to protect our schools and prevent the introduction of drugs and delinquency in schools."

"Because they need to, sometimes both parents work outside the home. Then there are problems. Their children get home from school and there is no one there to look after them. They go to the streets, to hang out with their friends, and that's what they end up in: drugs, alcoholism, gangs, but drugs and gangs mainly."

TABLE 1

THE FREE TO GROW TARGET COMMUNITY
COMPTON, CALIFORNIA, FREE TO GROW PROJECT

CHARACTERISTIC	CITY OF COMPTON	COMPTON SCHOOL DISTRICT
Population size	90,454 (1990)	27,647 (1994)
Racial/ethnic composition	46 percent Latino 48 percent black	61 percent Latino 38 percent black
Other characteristics	73 percent incomes under $25,000 26 percent receive public assistance 19 percent unemployment 40 percent jobless	Lowest student achievement scores in state Under state receivership

from 21 to 46 percent. Along with the large influx of Latino immigrants, there has been an exodus of the middle class. Compton is a very poor community, with high unemployment and joblessness and many people on public assistance.

The Compton school system faces a variety of serious problems. Its dilapidated buildings, covered with extensive graffiti, contain leaky roofs, broken-down bathrooms, and deteriorating facilities. Students score very low on standardized tests and drop out at high rates. The state took control over the Compton Unified School District in 1991, in a controversial move that the local school board and community have been contesting ever since. The schools are under such pressure from the state to show significant, rapid improvement in test scores, attendance, and other basic performance indicators that they find it hard to focus on the underlying chronic and systemic problems.

In addition, racial tensions have been inflamed over contentions that discipline in the schools is excessive and uneven. Further, although in many schools Latino children outnumber those of other racial and ethnic groups, most of the principals and teachers are black, as are most members of the school board and most leaders of Parent Teacher Associations.

Under a state initiative known as the School Desegregation Program (DESEG), launched in 1996, Compton schools receive funding to address racial tensions and improve safety, discipline practices, and parental involvement. Schools have hired or appointed staff to serve as community liaisons, designated parents to increase parental involvement in the schools, and identified current or former students to serve as peer counselors or mentors. The DESEG program also funds a security guard at each school. Staff and other resources from this program were helpful in the two Compton elementary schools involved in Free to Grow.

Community Voices: Problems with the Schools

"Latino children have always been discriminated against, punished more often in the schools by the teachers. When children of another race do the same things, they go unpunished. But when it's our children, they take them out of the classroom and force them to stand, in the summer, outside under the sun. We have seen them, three or four children standing outside of the classroom. I don't say that children shouldn't be disciplined; just that there are other, more appropriate methods, because the ones they are using are not very academic, appropriate to teach the children that they shouldn't behave a certain way."

—Parent Task Force Participant

It is very difficult working with the schools, and it is probably a good thing that in our community the Head Start centers are not located within the schools. It is as if they are holding on for holding on's sake. We tried to get the school district to agree to let us use some vacant school property, and the whole school delegation came out to protest. Older black residents are scared of losing everything. They don't see that the way to keep it is to build partnerships. This is such a very troubled community.

—Free to Grow Partner Representative

Drug and alcohol problems are serious in Compton. As in other poor communities where employment opportunities are limited, many people view the drug culture as a means of economic survival. In addition to high rates of use and abuse, the community faces significant problems with drug-related crime and gang activity. Other serious health problems are also widespread, including AIDS, tuberculosis, anemia, poor immunization rates, and measles. There are many substance abuse treatment programs and support groups serving Compton residents, all with a sliding-fee scale for people with limited income.

2. The Grantee and Its Head Start Project

Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, a historically black college, is the teaching arm of the Los Angeles County Martin Luther King, Jr. Hospital. Drew's Head Start project, the only one in the United States sponsored by a medical institution, has been in operation since 1968 and under Drew's auspices since 1973. With its strong links to the black community, Drew faces many challenges created by the demographic changes and resulting racial tensions that have arisen. In addition, Drew's medical facilities and teaching programs are under considerable financial pressure because of market changes related to managed care. Like others in stressed urban areas across the country, Drew closed its comprehensive outpatient health center in 1998 because of sharp declines in revenue and patients.

During the 1998-1999 program year, Drew Head Start was funded to serve 1,774 children, ages 3 to 5. A sister program operated by the Drew Child Development Center served an additional 42 children born exposed to or addicted to drugs or alcohol. The program employed 278 staff and had its own administrative, fiscal, and personnel offices. Historically, the program has operated quite separate from the larger university. In addition to 86 classes in 24 Head Start sites, Drew Head Start

operates a health clinic, a nutrition center, a family resources center, a warehouse, and administrative offices. The program has nine major components: (1) education (including the Child Development Center), (2) health, (3) nutrition, (4) mental health, (5) social services, (6) parent involvement, (7) special services, (8) training, and (9) facilities (transportation). Head Start classrooms are typically located in community centers and freestanding facilities rather than within elementary schools.

As one of the nation's oldest Head Start programs, Drew Head Start was launched during the War on Poverty, and over the years it has provided jobs and training opportunities for many local residents. The program has grown substantially, and the needs of the families it serves have become much more complex. Ensuring that staff have the skills and support to meet these complex needs has been an ongoing challenge, especially with the increase in non-English-speaking families and the lack of funding for infrastructure enhancements to accommodate the large increase in families served.

Drew Head Start experienced serious problems during the Free to Grow pilot period. During Phase I, an activist Parent Policy Council blocked proposed leadership hires and nearly caused the program to miss its grant renewal deadlines because of budget disputes. The Head Start director who helped prepare the Free to Grow application resigned late in 1995; the position remained vacant for nearly a year, then was filled with someone who was fired 18 months later for poor performance. During nearly two full years of the five-year Free to Grow pilot program, the position of Head Start director was either vacant or filled on an acting basis. Responsibility for Head Start within Drew also changed over time. The original Head Start Principal Investigator resigned in mid-1996, and in late 1996 oversight for the program was shifted out of Drew's Department of Pediatrics into the central administrator's office. Amidst all this change and disruption, Drew Head Start received very poor marks in its federal performance review in mid-1998 and was placed on probationary status.

This spurred an intensive management process to address deficiencies at both the grantee and the project levels. Drew's lack of involvement and management attention to Head Start surfaced as a major concern during the review, along with concerns about fiscal mismanagement, incomplete enrollment information, high caseloads for family service workers, and inadequately skilled and trained staff. Turmoil within the agency and Head Start coincided with the implementation of Free to Grow, which reduced the time and resources available to support the pilot effort and to integrate Free to Grow into Head Start.

C. DREW HEAD START'S FREE TO GROW MODEL

When it applied for the pilot grant, Drew Head Start saw Free to Grow as an opportunity to promote real parent involvement within Head Start and the larger community, while focusing on preventing substance abuse--a serious problem within Compton. Applicant leaders believed that parents and other residents would become more involved in the community if they were given the right training and opportunities to interact with and understand community institutions and systems. Using concepts of civic organizing, the Drew Head Start Free to Grow model focuses on building relationships at all levels within the community, as a means of empowering residents to understand and play a more active role in policy, governance, and leadership. Phase I efforts targeted Washington Elementary School and its vicinity. During Phase II, the project expanded to another Compton elementary school (Kelly) and several Head Start centers.

> *"Civic organizing emphasizes relationships over techniques and tasks, people and deliberate process over a product; and capacity building and empowerment over program and service delivery."*
>
> (Drew University's Phase II Free to Grow Grant Application)

This section describes the Free to Grow model in its final form. Separate sections describe changes made and lessons learned during the five-year pilot program.

1. Overview and Theory of Change

The Drew Head Start Free to Grow model focuses on community strengthening, which builds on existing Head Start family-strengthening efforts. The model aims to help community members work together constructively, and to make local schools and neighborhoods safer and more resistant to substance abuse problems. Key components include the following:

- ***Community Coalition,*** made up of parents and other residents, along with business, agency, and city representatives
- ***"Safe Space" Task Forces,*** made up mainly of parents and based in elementary schools and Head Start centers
- ***Parent Advocates,*** Head Start parents trained to conduct peer outreach and education among other parents and community members
- ***Youth Advocates,*** adolescents and young adults trained to serve as peer leaders and role models

Training in substance abuse prevention and civic organizing is an important part of each component. Together, these components are designed to improve community systems and make them more responsive to and protective of children and their families. Although the model does not include an explicit family-strengthening component, many aspects of the community-strengthening work are intended to improve the lives of parents and families.

The logic model included in Attachment A shows the pathways through which Free to Grow interventions were expected to influence short- and long-term outcomes. Some of the key outcomes include parents and other residents assuming leadership roles, increased parental involvement in

schools, cleaner and safer schools and neighborhoods, improved relationships among residents and agency/provider representatives, and stronger community norms against drug and alcohol use.

2. Staffing and Project Oversight

Several new positions were created to conduct Free to Grow work. A full-time project coordinator managed day-to-day project activities, led the community coalition, conducted training sessions, and served as the key liaison between the project and various partner and other community organizations. Two full-time community organizers were responsible for supervising the parent advocates, supporting the school and Head Start task forces, and assisting with coalition and other communitywide activities and events. Parent advocates, who were paid a stipend of $100 per month, periodically assisted Free to Grow staff with clerical and other office tasks. In addition to these regular positions, several consultants played an important role in training Free to Grow staff and other community members in principles of civic organizing and substance abuse prevention.

Project oversight within Drew and Head Start was provided in several ways. The Head Start Director and Drew's Principal Investigator for Head Start were the direct supervisors. The project was also guided by a strategic management team that comprised these and other senior managers within Drew and Head Start. The strategic team played a more active role in guiding the project during Phase I, in part because many other pressing management and organizational issues consumed their attention during Phase II. Although the intent was that this strategy group would help integrate and build support for Free to Grow within Head Start and Drew, and strengthen the project's relationships with other community organizations, crises within the Head Start program, as well as frequent turnover among Head Start and Drew University leadership, reduced the group's effectiveness as an oversight body for Free to Grow.

Free to Grow operated out of Washington Elementary School, in classroom space donated by the Compton Unified School District. Being located within the target community helped in establishing a local presence for the project, but it also made building relationships with Head Start and Drew University staff more difficult.

3. Model Components

Major components of the Drew Head Start Free to Grow model are summarized in Table 2 and described below.

a. Community Coalition

The citywide community coalition involved a variety of community members: Head Start parents and other community residents, the Compton Unified School District, the Compton Police Department, local youth organizations, churches, and numerous grassroots civic and advocacy organizations. Meetings were held monthly or every other month; Free to Grow staff typically organized and led the meetings, developed the agendas and other meeting materials, and played an active role in implementing coalition activities. Coalition members provided input to shape the agenda and sometimes took the lead in implementing project activities, but the coalition did not have a leadership committee and never became self-sustaining.

Parent advocates (described further below) helped recruit other parents and community residents for the coalition and helped implement coalition activities. Some residents may also have learned about the coalition through the project's promotional efforts, which included broadcasts on radio and public access cable television stations. (To take advantage of free or low-cost time slots, these broadcasts were typically late at night or early in the morning at each.) More than 120 people participated in the council at least once during the five years, with roughly 40 at each meeting. In

TABLE 2

FREE TO GROW COMMUNITY-STRENGTHENING COMPONENTS
FREE TO GROW PROJECT IN COMPTON, CALIFORNIA

COMPONENT	STAFF	DESCRIPTION	PARTICIPATION STATISTICS
Community Coalition	Free to Grow project coordinator and community organizers Parent Advocates	Forum for community residents, providers and agencies to develop skills in civic organizing and conduct activities to strengthen the community.	120 participated in one or more meetings during Phase I 37 members during Phase II 25-30 core members; 8-10 attending each meeting.
Safe Space Task Forces	Community Organizers Parent Advocates	Elementary school- and Head Start-based groups of parents are trained in substance abuse prevention and civic organizing to serve as leaders and advocates within the schools and Head Start centers.	92 total Washington Elementary: 18 Kelly Elementary: 51 Laurel Street Head Start: 8 Small World Head Start: 5 St. Peter's Head Start: 10
Parent Advocates	Free to Grow staff Consultants	Former Head Start parents trained in leadership skills, civic organizing, and substance abuse prevention to conduct outreach to other parents, serve as liaisons with safe space task forces, attend coalition meetings and other meetings at community organizations, and educate parents about Free to Grow. Parent advocates also assisted Free to Grow staff with events and activities sponsored by the project.	29 trained; 10 active 7 in Phase I 3 in Phase II
Youth Advocates	Consultant	Youth are trained in leadership skills, advocacy, conflict resolution, and substance abuse prevention. In addition to serving as role models for other youth, youth advocates plan activities to involve community youth in positive social and community-building experiences	23 involved in one or more training sessions 7 core members in Phase I 12 core members in Phase II

general, the project was able to maintain a core group of very active coalition members, including parents and grassroots leaders from both the Latino and black segments of the community. Although the coalition was sustained throughout the pilot period, at several points during the five-year pilot the group stopped meeting as regularly. This happened in part because Free to Grow staff did not always have time to organize the meetings. During Phase II, the coalition stopped meeting for nearly a year as project staff focused their energy on building the safe space task forces in elementary schools and Head Start centers.

As in the other Free to Grow sites, achieving the right balance of residents and agency/provider officials was a challenge. The project held coalition meetings on Saturday mornings because this time was convenient for residents, but agency/provider staff preferred meeting during the regular work week. During the latter part of Phase II, few agency/provider officials participated in the coalition, perhaps in part because at the time the group was engaged in a somewhat controversial "Report Card" effort to grade the quality of community services and systems for children. To bring agency and provider representatives back to the table, project staff decided, toward the end of Phase II, to create another group, which they called the Prevention Network, that would complement the grassroots coalition. During its short tenure (several months at the end of Phase II), Prevention Network members talked about how community programs and services could become more responsive to the needs of community residents.

Coalition Activities. Coalition efforts addressed systemwide concerns in addition to supporting activities targeted at individual schools and Head Start centers. System-level work focused on increasing awareness of community programs and resources, improving access to tutoring services, and providing a mechanism for community members to provide input to state and local officials about the quality of programs and services for children. After discovering that many coalition members were unaware of each other's programs and activities, the coalition decided to create a "community calendar" of meetings and other events. Throughout the project, Free to Grow staff and parent advocates attended many of these meetings and events, increasing awareness and improving coordination by sharing information about Free to Grow and bringing news back to the coalition. The coalition also helped find volunteers to sustain and expand a children's storytelling program, and developed a telephone hotline to connect families with tutoring resources within the community.

Free to Grow Coalition Activities

- Free to Grow kick-off rally
- Master community meetings calendar
- Resource guide
- Graffiti removal campaign
- Cleanups and flower-planting on school grounds
- Sponsorship of a Boy Scout troop
- Promotion of a local tutoring program
- Petting Zoo Rally and Field Trip
- Survey of community residents (Community Engagement Process)
- Community Leadership Academy
- Report Card effort to assess the quality of local schools and other programs for children

Other coalition activities focused on schools in the Free to Grow target areas. During Phase I, the Compton Police Department and other coalition members helped get the area around Washington Elementary School declared a Drug-Free School Zone. The coalition also organized

block parties and cleanup days and participated in annual Unity Festival activities organized by other community organizations. As mentioned earlier, in the final two years, the coalition focused on developing a "Report Card" that would assess the quality of life for the community's children. Although this assessment was intended to encompass the full spectrum of community services and resources, coalition members were most concerned about providing input on the schools.

Assessing Needs and Resources. To build a foundation for coalition and other project efforts, during Phase I, project staff developed a "profile" of needs and available resources within the Compton community. First, they compiled a list of more than 130 community needs or concerns, using existing survey data (including data from an enterprise zone grant application), along with new data from interviews and focus groups with Head Start parents and staff, community youth, and other local residents. Free to Grow staff then developed and conducted an "asset assessment survey" of Head Start and other community organizations to compile data on available resources. The assets information was used to compile a community resource directory. Free to Grow staff then guided coalition members in a "Charting the Future" effort, which involved mapping out community needs and assets to identify priority areas for project intervention.

Additional surveys to assess community needs and resources were conducted during Phase II in two target areas (the catchment areas for Washington and Kelly elementary schools), with assistance from an outside consulting firm.[2] Local residents were trained to conduct these surveys, and many community members, as well as the media, attended the meeting held to present the findings. Overall, project staff considered the *process* of assessing community needs and resources

[2]"Neighborhood Safety Survey Results." Report prepared by Phillibcr Research Associates on findings from the Community Engagement Process survey conducted in Compton, California, in September 1998.

to be as important as the outcome, as it engaged residents actively and established Free to Grow's credibility as a community-driven initiative.

Leadership Training. As a core element of the civic organizing approach, leadership training was offered to coalition members and other interested community members at several times during the pilot program. Parent advocates and safe space task force members also received training (discussed below). The original plan was to utilize a train-the-trainer approach where the parent advocates and seasoned coalition members would train new coalition and task force members. This approach was never put into operation, however, in part because project staff lacked confidence in the abilities of parent advocates to play this role. Early in Phase II, a more formal training program known as the Community Leadership Academy was developed with the help of project consultants. The 10-week curriculum was also recorded on videotape so that it could be repeated as needed for new coalition and safe space task force members.

b. Safe Space Task Forces

To complement the communitywide focus of the coalition and strengthen Free to Grow's link to Head Start and the schools, the project focused during Phase II on developing "mini coalitions" that would be based in specific schools and Head Start centers. Using the approach pilot tested in Washington Elementary School during Phase I, the project established safe space task forces in two Compton elementary schools (Washington and Kelly) and in four Head Start centers (Washington, Laurel Street, Small World, and St. Peter's). The project had originally targeted two other elementary schools but had trouble getting support from principals and teachers. Fortunately, Kelly Elementary became very interested in Free to Grow, and the resulting task force became one of the project's most successful endeavors.

Head Start centers in Compton are not linked closely to particular elementary schools, in part because the centers are typically not colocated on elementary school campuses. One exception to this is Washington Elementary, which has a Head Start center on site. Because of this, the project was able to combine the elementary school and Head Start task force groups toward the end of Phase II. The combined group lasted for only a few months and dissolved several months before the pilot ended, in part because the Head Start parents focused their concerns on a particular teacher rather than on issues common to the rest of the group.

The safe space task forces were structured similarly and had similar basic objectives: creating "safe spaces" within and around the schools and Head Start centers. For example, they encouraged the local police to establish Drug-Free School Zones and community/school watch programs, had speed bumps and traffic signals installed, and worked with school leadership to improve relations between teachers/staff and children/parents. The elementary school task force members banded together to block a controversial proposal that, because of overcrowding, would have required fifth graders in ESL programs across the district to take classes in the middle schools. Parents, concerned about the impact of the tougher middle school environment, particularly on the younger girls, led a petition and lobbied hard for alternatives. Largely because of their efforts, the district decided to solve the space problem by installing trailers on elementary school campuses. The district also added special reading labs in several schools, something they had planned to provide as "compensation" for the disruption of moving children to the middle schools.

Average Number of Participants in Safe Space Task Forces

Washington Elementary School	25
Kelly Elementary School	40
Washington Head Start	10
Laurel Street Head Start	8
Small World Head Start	2
St. Peter's Head Start	12

In some cases the task forces also functioned as peer support groups. This was especially true for the Kelly Elementary School task force, whose members established a telephone tree and communicated with each other frequently outside the weekly meetings. The original plan was that teachers, other staff, and even community providers would participate in the groups, but this did not happen very often. While involving the staff and providers might have been helpful in building relationships, parents probably felt more comfortable sharing their concerns with their peers. The community liaison from the DESEG program at Kelly, however, played a key role in supporting the task force and enabling the group to function without the direct support of Free to Grow project staff.

Project staff provided orientation and training for safe space task force members. Members also were encouraged to attend coalition meetings and to participate in additional training (such as the Community Leadership Academy) sponsored by the coalition. In general, however, there was not a strong connection between the school-based task forces and the communitywide coalition.

c. Parent Advocates

In this innovative component, the project recruited and trained former Head Start parents to conduct outreach and peer training, help establish safe space task forces in Head Start centers, and support various coalition and project activities. Parent advocates were selected from among the pool of parents who had completed Drew Head Start's parent training program, a one-year job-readiness program. The Free to Grow training focused on individual leadership development (for

Parent Advocate Training Topics

1. Free to Grow reading circle
2. Public speaking techniques
3. Recruitment of other parent advocates
4. Safe space task force training
5. Community Leadership Academy
6. Preparing yourself from personal to public leadership
7. Complaint procedure
8. Youth advocates
9. Life skills development training
10. Home, school, and community relations

example, public speaking, effective meeting participation skills), civic organizing, and substance abuse prevention and intervention skills (such as recognizing and identifying risk factors for children and families). Parent advocates recruited parents to the Head Start task forces, connected parents with community resources, supervised a reading circle program, and supported coalition meetings and activities. They worked as volunteers and received a small stipend of $100 per month.

New parent advocate recruits viewed the program as an opportunity to gain work-related skills; parents were told that the program would prepare them for careers in the social services or human resources fields. The minimum time commitment expected was 456 hours over a two-year period: 96 hours of training, 10 hours of attending coalition and related meetings; and 350 hours of performing community service. Typically, parent advocates devoted 15 to 20 hours a week to the project. Although project staff hoped parent advocates would stay on for two years--one for training and another for service--many dropped out sooner. The project recruited and trained a total of 20 parent advocates (17 during Phase I and 3 during Phase II); 10 stayed with the project for at least two years.

Despite its strong start and promise during Phase I, the parent advocate component fizzled during Phase II for a variety of reasons. New work requirements associated with welfare reform led many trained parent advocates to seek other paid employment opportunities, including positions with Head Start. Welfare reform rules also made it difficult to recruit new parents, because the parent advocate training was not certified as job-related training under the state's welfare program. Some parent advocates quit because the work differed from what they expected; others were encouraged to leave because they lacked necessary skills or work habits. Though the plan was that parent advocates, after training, would eventually lead the safe space training sessions, the project coordinator never considered the advocates ready and continued to lead the sessions himself. Over

time it became very difficult for project staff to "sell" the parent advocate position, and toward the end of the project's third year, they stopped recruiting completely.

d. Youth Advocates

This component was intended to complement the parent advocate component, training and empowering youth to serve as positive role models and "ambassadors" for substance abuse prevention within the community. The original plan was that the youth advocates would have younger siblings in Head Start and be trained by YMCA staff. However, the YMCA's involvement fell through early in Phase I, and the project hired a local consultant to work with the advocates. The consultant was paid for the training work, although she provided substantial ongoing support on a voluntary basis (roughly 20 to 25 hours per month). Youth advocates received a total of 20 hours of training through eight 2.5-hour sessions that focused on life skill and leadership skill development, substance abuse prevention, and community organizing. The consultant blended training and action so that the youth would have opportunities to "learn by doing." Overall, a total of 28 youth were involved at one time or another, with a core group of 10 to 12 active members. Most were black and between ages 11 and 22; none had younger siblings in Head Start, though they did live in the target community.

Leadership Training for Youth Advocates

1. Substance abuse prevention
2. Conflict resolution
3. Advocacy and communication skills
4. Problem solving
5. Domestic violence
6. Sexual assault
7. Project planning
8. Leadership development

The activities sponsored by the youth advocates had similar goals: (1) providing safe and positive social opportunities, (2) educating participants about substance abuse prevention, and (3) encouraging youth to be more involved in community events and organizations. While the group

did not meet the (probably overly ambitious) goal of one activity per month, they did sponsor a number of successful events. These events allowed local youth to socialize in a drug-free environment, and they raised awareness about needs within the community and about ways that local youth could become involved in addressing these needs. During Phase I, the youth advocates organized a "Unity in the Community" dance that was attended by 200 youth, where the admission fee involved completing a substance abuse survey designed by the youth advocates. During the second year of Phase II, they organized a field trip to Universal Studios, a back-to-school dance (that included a collection of canned foods and school supplies for needy families), a fashion show (that included a collection of Christmas toys and canned foods), and a talent show (that included a clothing drive).

During the project's final year, the youth advocates focused directly on substance abuse and conducted a survey of local stores to determine if they were complying with the local ordinance that limited the percentage of advertising space that could be devoted to alcohol or tobacco products. They found that many stores exceeded the 30 percent maximum specified in the ordinance, and the group presented its findings at the project's final coalition meeting. Another activity planned for the final year, a youth conference on substance abuse issues and other topics of interest, was canceled after the group had trouble securing support from other community organizations. Also, the Free to Grow project coordinator did not think the youth were adequately prepared to lead the conference sessions as planned.

Although the youth advocate group had close ties to Free to Grow (the daughter of the project coordinator was a long-standing member), it was not linked closely to any of the other project components. Group members did not have younger siblings in Head Start, and there was very little interaction or coordination between the youth advocates and Head Start parents or task forces. The

group did attend some of the coalition meetings and other project events,[3] but their involvement in the coalition meetings became less frequent when the two groups began meeting at the same time (Saturday mornings).

4. Support from Free to Grow Staff

With few exceptions, project staff played a central role in Free to Grow meetings and activities. For the coalition and most of the task forces, Free to Grow staff prepared the agendas and other meeting materials, organized refreshments, handled publicity, and led most of the follow-up activities. Although project staff had hoped to foster a coalition and task force groups that would function independently under the guidance of grassroots leadership, this materialized only with the Kelly elementary school task force. Whereas Kelly task force members took ownership of and became empowered by Free to Grow ideas, the other task forces and the community coalition never became self-sustaining. While Free to Grow staff were very effective in bringing parents and other residents together, in most cases they were not as effective in giving group members the skills and opportunities to take ownership for Free to Grow work.

The Free to Grow project coordinator played a central role in shaping project activities, bringing valuable grassroots organizing skills, knowledge of the community, and a passion for making a difference for children to the work. The civic organizing paradigm, however, required superior diplomacy skills and the ability to work within the system to build relationships with agency and institutional officials. While project consultants provided valuable guidance and leadership in civic organizing principles, the coordinator did not have all the skills necessary to carry out this work

[3] Early in Phase I, the group helped with the coalition's "Charting the Future" effort to map out community needs and resources, and each year they also operated an information booth at the annual Unity Festivals supported by the coalition.

effectively. Management problems within Drew and Head Start exacerbated the problem, as senior Drew and Head Start staff did not acknowledge the staffing problem until very late in Phase II, and other concerns limited staff time and resources to support Free to Grow fully.

5. Partnerships

The Compton Free to Grow effort established ties with a number of community agencies and grassroots organizations that had not previously partnered with Drew Head Start. The project also experienced setbacks along the way, as some partners failed to "step up to the plate," and others pulled back over time. Table 3 describes the roles that more active partners and collaborators played.

The most active partnerships were with the Compton Police Department, Compton Community College, and the Compton Unified School District. Many other organizations either participated in the coalition or helped support Free to Grow events in some manner. Community relations staff from the Police Department played a key role in establishing Drug-Free School Zones and in removing graffiti at the targeted elementary schools. They also educated coalition and task force members about domestic violence, immigration issues, and ways to identify illegal drugs. Project staff worked with the police to recruit children and parents to participate in various police-sponsored programs and activities: Red Ribbon Week (drug/alcohol prevention and awareness), Cops for Kids, the Police Athletic League, and the Boy Scout Explorers program. Compton Community College donated space for many Free to Grow meetings and events and helped organize the Community Leadership Academy training program. The school district donated space for the Free to Grow project office in Washington Elementary School, provided space and other support for the two elementary school safe space task forces, and participated actively in Free to Grow meetings and events during Phase I.

TABLE 3

FREE TO GROW PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS
FREE TO GROW PROJECT IN COMPTON, CALIFORNIA

ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION OF ROLE/CONTRIBUTION	HEAD START COLLABORATOR PRIOR TO FREE TO GROW?
COMPTON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT Central administration Washington Elementary Kelly Elementary	Participated in community coalition meetings (especially during Phase I). Provided space at Washington Elementary School for Free to Grow project office. Collaborated with Free to Grow through school district desegregation program (which addresses racial tensions, school safety, discipline, and parent involvement in the schools).	Yes
COMPTON POLICE DEPARTMENT	Participated in community coalition meetings. Made presentations to coalition and safe space task force groups on identifying drugs/substances, drug free school zones, domestic violence, and immigration issues. Involved task force members in their Citizen Police Academy program. Sponsored activities for children and families, including Red Ribbon Week, Cops for Kids, Police Activities League, and the Explorers program. Assisted with establishment of Drug-Free School Zones and graffiti abatement efforts. Conducted community policing program (predated Free to Grow).	No
COMPTON SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE	Met with safe space task force parents. Coordinated school watch program.	No
COMPTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE	Provided space for community coalition meetings. Sponsored the tutoring program that was supported by the coalition. Participated in the Free to Grow Community Leadership Academy training held during Phase II.	No
WESTERN REGIONAL CENTER FOR DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES	Participated in community coalition meetings during Phase I. Provided expertise in substance abuse prevention.	No

The Compton school district police helped the project by talking to task force members and coordinating school watch programs in the two elementary schools. Another organization, Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities, played an active role in the early stages of the project, with staff providing expertise in substance abuse prevention. Organizational and budget changes played a part in preventing two other organizations, the YWCA of Greater Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Urban Communities Coalition, from leading the youth advocate component and the coalition, respectively, as originally proposed. The loss of support from these and other potential partners increased the demands on project staff. Although the project was able to find a consultant to help lead the youth advocate group, they were not able to find another group to lead the coalition, and, as mentioned earlier, the project coordinator lacked the skills to run the group effectively alone.

Although the project's relationships with the police department and the community college remained strong throughout the pilot, the partnership with the school district weakened over time. Despite strong initial support from the school district's top official, a true partnership based on some degree of "give and take" never emerged. The Free to Grow coordinator, a parent of children in the school system and an experienced grassroots organizer, wanted change to happen quickly; school district officials, faced with deep-rooted and long-standing problems, believed that real change required time and a spirit of collaboration rather than confrontation. As Free to Grow became somewhat more confrontational (particulary through the coalition's "Report Card" initiative), it was difficult for school district leadership to maintain close ties to the project.

6. Capacity Building Through Training and Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance played a central role in Drew's Free to Grow project. Formal training sessions were built into each project component and provided the foundation for civic organizing. The various training curricula were developed with assistance from consultants, who also conducted many of the training sessions. While they shared common elements, some of the training workshops focused on developing personal skills (life skills and leadership development), while others emphasized the process of conducting community-strengthening work (civic organizing, safe space training, and the Community Leadership Academy).

During semiannual Free to Grow grantee meetings sponsored by the NPO, the project gained insights from other projects and learned more about how Free to Grow activities fit with substance abuse prevention theory. The NPO provided additional training and technical assistance during regular site visits and phone consultations with the project. The grantee meetings and ongoing support from the NPO helped project staff think strategically about adjustments and refinements that could make the model more effective. For example, the NPO encouraged the project to focus on developing parent-based task forces in schools and Head Start centers. The NPO and its consultants also helped the project to refine goals and objectives for the project. To help staff move forward from training to action, the NPO required detailed workplans, and the local expert in civic organizing began working closely with project staff on day-to-day implementation issues. The NPO also worked with its consultants to conduct a more general management workshop for Free to Grow and Head Start staff.

In general, project staff seemed to prefer regular assistance with practical implementation matters (help with how-to) over more general or conceptual types of training. Staff also seemed to be more receptive when the training was delivered in an empowering rather than a critical manner.

On the one hand, local project leaders resented being told what to do, but they also had difficulty making strategic adjustments to the workplan to contend with new circumstances and lessons learned over time. Communication problems between the NPO and local project staff seemed in some ways to mirror the problems project staff had communicating with partner agencies and other local officials. It seemed difficult for the project coordinator in particular to recognize and focus on shared concerns and to engage in the give and take necessary to promote a shared agenda.

D. Implementation Experience

1. Changes in the Model over Time

The most significant structural change in the Drew Head Start Free to Grow model was the addition during Phase II of task forces based in schools and Head Start centers. The original plan was to engage parents and youth actively in the larger community coalition, primarily through leadership training and the efforts of trained parent and youth advocates. Although the coalition became an active forum for a diverse group of residents and community organizations to address overarching community issues, over time it became clear that a different approach would be needed to involve parents of school-age children. The larger community coalition went through a year-long period of very low activity when the safe space task forces were being established. The coalition did eventually reconvene, though there was very little linkage or coordination of coalition and safe space task force efforts.

As mentioned earlier, the parent advocate component weakened over time for a variety of reasons. The project was unable to attract any new parent advocates during the final two years of the pilot project, though three parent advocates trained during Phase I remained involved during Phase II.

2. Expansion

This project set ambitious goals for expansion during Phase II: to maintain the citywide coalition, establish safe space task forces in seven Compton schools (three elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school), increase the number of parent advocates from 10 to 14, and increase the number of youth advocates from 20 to 25. After many struggles, delays, and substitutions, the project eventually established safe space task forces in six locations, only one of which (Washington Elementary) was included in the original list. Project staff tried unsuccessfully to get task forces started in two other elementary schools, and then, realizing that it would likely be even harder to get the middle schools and high school on board, they began focusing on Head Start centers. The Head Start link was also seen as a way to build capacity and support for Free to Grow within Head Start.

Although some of the task forces were quite successful, others had more difficulty getting started or building momentum. The more successful groups were located in schools or Head Start centers that contained at least one strong supporter (the principal, a community aide, or a Head Start staff person). For a variety of reasons, Head Start leadership did not play a large role in helping to build this support, particulary as Head Start performance problems began consuming so much management attention. At the end of Phase II, only one of the task forces (Kelly) was still operating; the others had stopped meeting several months before.

With the notable exception of the Kelly task force, the project did not succeed in preparing local residents to conduct Free to Grow work. Free to Grow staff were very effective in grassroots organizing, getting residents to rally together and become involved in the community, especially the schools. In general, however, they failed to recognize and develop the capabilities of coalition members, parent advocates, and task force members to take over such efforts. The staff also had

difficulty working "within the system" to build relationships with agency and provider officials. Head Start leadership failed to provide the support and direction necessary to overcome this limitation, and implementation suffered. At Kelly, a strong core group of parents and the community liaison funded through the DESEG program played key roles in supporting the safe space task force and enabling it to become self-sufficient.

3. Integration into Head Start

At the end of the five-year pilot, none of the Free to Grow components had been integrated into Head Start. There was some discussion midway through Phase II about integrating the Free to Grow training workshops to support Head Start's parent involvement efforts, but this idea was placed on the back burner after the Head Start director was fired and the program's survival became threatened by a poor performance review. Although Drew Head Start did not formally integrate Free to Grow components, the project did help Drew Head Start restructure its program to meet revised Head Start performance standards. In fact, one of the program's three major goals for 1999-2000 was "to improve the environments surrounding the Head Start facilities through incorporation of Free to Grow program principles." Free to Grow reinforced the importance of substance abuse prevention, and of developing partnerships with parents and community organizations.

4. Sustaining the Work

When the pilot program ended, there were no firm plans to sustain any of the project components, although the Kelly Elementary School task force was expected to continue with support from the school's DESEG

> *"Even if we don't get the money from them anymore, can we keep the name Libres Para Crecer (Free To Grow)? It really means a lot around here. . . ."*
>
> —Parent task force member

program community liaison. Efforts to sustain Free to Grow in this community were hampered by two major factors. First, Drew Head Start was unable to sustain Free to Grow through integration of Free to Grow staff positions or training components into Head Start. Furthermore, project staff were not successful in making the coalition and most of the task forces self-sufficient so that they could be sustained in other ways. While Free to Grow staff clearly played a large role in establishing and supporting the Kelly task force, other factors also contributed to its success. Parent members of this task force were especially committed and willing to devote substantial time to the group, perhaps in part because the task force gave Latino parents with little voice in the larger school and community systems a forum to share concerns and work together to influence local policies. Support from the school's DESEG program community liaison also provided the group with practical support in putting agendas together and taking action, as well as giving the group a greater sense of legitimacy within the system.

E. Perceived Changes in Families and Communities

Although the impact of Free to Grow was not measured formally during the pilot program, project staff, partners, and participating parents were asked about the changes in families and communities that they had observed since the project began. While these perceptions do not provide rigorous evidence of program effectiveness, they give some indication of the types of outcomes the project may have influenced during the model development and implementation period. Thus, they lay the groundwork for a formal evaluation of the model. Table 4 shows the magnitude of changes perceived in key outcome areas targeted by the project.

TABLE 4

CHANGES IN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES REPORTED BY FREE TO GROW STAFF, PARTNERS, AND PARTICIPATING PARENTS, FREE TO GROW PROJECT IN COMPTON, CALIFORNIA

CHANGES SPECIFIED IN THE PROJECT'S LOGIC MODEL	MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE PERCEIVED BY FREE TO GROW STAFF, PARTNERS, AND PARTICIPATING PARENTS		
	Large	Moderate	Small
FAMILY LEVEL			
• Increased knowledge and understanding of substance abuse prevention concepts and resources • Stronger family norms against the use of alcohol and other drugs			•
• Increased knowledge of community services/resources; fewer unmet service needs • Increased parent skills in advocating for family needs	•		
COMMUNITY LEVEL			
• Increased involvement of residents in neighborhood/ community groups; involvement of parents in schools • Greater levels of attachment to the community among residents; increased interaction and bonding among residents	•		
• Stronger leadership and advocacy skills among parents, youth and other community residents	•		
• Improved collaboration/partnership among residents and community agencies and officials • Increased coordination and collaboration among service providers and community agencies		•	
• Improved neighborhood/community environment			•
• Identification of gaps in community services • Improved availability and access to community resources		•	
• Increased knowledge and understanding of substance abuse prevention concepts and resources • Stronger community attitudes and norms against the use of alcohol and other drugs			•
• Increased involvement of youth with healthy (drug-free) peers and activities • Stronger attachment among youth to positive community norms and values • Improved attachment to school and school performance	•		
• Greater satisfaction among parents and other community residents with the neighborhood/community			•

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. Changes in Families

> *"Free to Grow has helped raised my self-esteem. It has increased my participation in the community. Because of my participation in the task force, I feel like I am worth more as a human being, that I am being useful to society. I have become better linked with other parents."*
>
> —Parent task force member

Although the Compton model did not include a direct family-strengthening component, there were some benefits for families associated with the community-strengthening work. Large changes were reported in awareness of community resources among families, and (for the parent advocates) in skills to advocate for family needs. To a small extent, the project was perceived as having helped families understand how to strengthen family norms to guard against the use of drugs and alcohol. Free to Grow educational workshops and training sessions were especially valued for giving families information about community resources and helping them to recognize different drugs and signs that their children may be in trouble.

2. Changes in the Community

> *"Free to Grow has demonstrated that it is possible for the different races to work together, side by side, to improve the community."*
>
> —Free to Grow partner
>
> *"We became empowered both as parents and as community activists."*
>
> —Participating parent
>
> *"There is more security, more control (in our school). The physical plant conditions have improved a lot, too. You may ask: 'But what does having a clean school have to do with substance abuse prevention or with school success?' But, you see, if children have a clean, comfortable, safe building in which to study, they are going to learn more in their classes and think: 'No, no...I'm an educated, worthwhile person; I'm going to say no to drugs.'"*
>
> —Participating parent

At the community level, Free to Grow was viewed as having made a significant contribution in getting residents and parents more involved in and attached to the community, and in increasing the level of interaction and bonding among residents. Respondents also saw Free to Grow as building stronger advocacy and leadership skills among parents, youth and other residents.

Furthermore, large changes were perceived in the opportunities for youth to associate with drug-free peers, develop stronger attachments to school, and adopt positive norms and values. Smaller improvements were observed in the physical condition of neighborhoods and public spaces, in strengthening community norms and attitudes about drug and alcohol use, and in the extent to which residents felt satisfied with their neighborhood and the community overall. However, in a community as large as Compton, with such serious and long-standing problems, one would expect change in these areas to take considerable time and resources. On a smaller scale, Free to Grow was seen as having made a big improvement in the physical conditions within targeted elementary schools.

F. Value Added to Head Start

Although Free to Grow was not integrated formally into Head Start during the pilot program, the Free to Grow approach did add value to Head Start. Especially when Drew Head Start was struggling to address problems identified during its performance review, Free to Grow provided a tangible example of how to involve parents and the larger community as partners. It also helped to reinforce the importance of viewing Head Start within a broader context, where families and community play a major role in shaping outcomes for children. As some observers noted, Free to Grow helped Head Start leadership begin to think more concretely about ways to move beyond the classroom to address larger social and community issues influencing the health and well-being of Head Start children and families. More specifically, Head Start administrators began to see the value of training Head Start staff in substance abuse prevention and civic organizing concepts. Although plans were still tentative at the end of the pilot, the hope was that at least some of the Free to Grow training modules could be added to the ongoing and special training sessions provided to Head Start

staff. Head Start staff and other community members also valued the community resource guide and community calendars that Free to Grow developed as these provided a foundation for stronger coordination and partnership among the various family-serving organizations.

The value of the Compton Free to Grow model for Head Start was really not tested fully, as a result of weak implementation stemming largely from staffing weaknesses and the many problems the grantee and Head Start program faced during the pilot effort. In theory, the model is quite strong and would seem to offer Head Start much value in strengthening partnerships with parents and community organizations and in placing greater emphasis on primary prevention principles. The Compton experience suggests that a strong and stable institutional foundation must be in place to support Free to Grow work, with Head Start staff and administrators serving as strong ambassadors for the program both internally and with outside partners. This foundation helps to ensure that the work moves beyond training to building strong relationships and promoting meaningful participation among parents and other residents in community systems and governance.

G. Lessons to Guide Future Efforts

The Compton Free to Grow experience provides many lessons to help others trying to implement this primary substance abuse prevention model. Above all, experiences in this pilot site demonstrate the importance of community, grantee, and Head Start context to the success of Free to Grow strategies. The following sections highlight the factors that helped move the Free to Grow agenda forward, as well as those that made the work difficult. The final section provides advice for other programs interested in applying the Compton Free to Grow model in their communities.

1. Promising Program Practices and Facilitating Factors

The Compton Free to Grow experience was influenced by factors in several areas: the community, the grantee and Head Start program environment, the approach employed for community-strengthening work, and partnerships and collaborations (Table 5). As in other pilot sites, residents and other community members were willing to come together partly because problems in the community have been so serious for so long. With its positive message and emphasis on building leadership capacity, Free to Grow resonated with residents and motivated them to put aside their differences. In a similar vein, the poor federal performance review served as a wake-up call for Drew and Head Start management staff to address long-standing management and performance problems that now threatened the future of the Head Start program. Senior management staff began an intensive process of "taking stock" and considering new approaches. They also began to see more clearly how certain elements of Free to Grow would help them meet revised Head Start performance standards (especially those related to parent involvement and community partnerships).

The final form of the Compton Free to Grow model proved to be a very strong asset, with its emphasis on community strengthening through strong links to Head Start centers and elementary schools, as well as its use of parent and youth advocates as grassroots leaders. Model components are designed to complement one another, and the model is rooted strongly in substance abuse prevention theory. Both the parent and the youth advocate components put residents front and center as the primary agents for changing identified risk and protective factors. Other elements provide critical support: a community resource guide and community calendars, solid training and leadership development, and a formal assessment of community strengths and weaknesses. This last activity

TABLE 5

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FREE TO GROW EXPERIENCE
FREE TO GROW PROJECT IN COMPTON, CALIFORNIA

FACILITATORS	CHALLENGES
COMMUNITY LEVEL	
A perception of serious and persistent community problems (related to racial tensions, poverty, illegal drugs, crime and violence) helps bring residents and providers together.	Community members are skeptical about new programs promising to change serious and long-standing problems. Major shifts in racial and ethnic composition creates tension within the community. Long-standing norms that discourage parent involvement in schools and other community institutions are difficult to overcome. Work-related welfare reform rules make it difficult to find and keep parents to serve as parent advocates.
GRANTEE/HEAD START PROGRAM LEVEL	
Serious internal problems can provide an opportunity to consider new approaches. Free to Grow's contribution to Head Start performance standards was recognized as an asset during efforts to address performance problems. Short-term resources for Head Start staff development are available to agencies with performance problems.	Internal problems (leadership turnover, program performance issues, etc.) consume management attention. Grantee and Head Start leadership must take responsibility for effectively explaining and promoting Free to Grow to Head Start teachers and social workers. Head Start staff must be willing and able to take on new responsibilities (such as helping to recruit parents for Free to Grow groups and activities). Grantee and Head Start management must recognize staff performance problems and take effective corrective action. Staff morale suffers when management does not take steps to correct problems. It is more difficult to help families transition from Head Start to elementary school when the Head Start centers are not linked closely with specific elementary schools.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TABLE 5 *(continued)*

FACILITATORS	CHALLENGES
COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING WORK	
The language used to describe Free to Grow (Every Child Deserves a Safe Space to Live Somewhere on this Planet) helps engage parents and other community members. The parent advocate approach, using parents to recruit and educate other parents, is helpful in reaching parents who do not trust or feel comfortable with agency/provider officials. The youth advocate component provides an innovative mechanism for involving local youth in prevention work, and provides them with positive drug-free opportunities. Resource guides and community event calendars give Free to Grow and other community programs a tool for linking parents with services and other resources. Formal training for coalition and safe space task force members builds important skills. Formal community assessments help council members focus efforts on priority issues. Motivated and committed residents help sustain council and task force efforts.	Making services and programs accessible and responsive to families requires one-on-one problem solving with residents and community agencies. Projects must be willing to let coalition members assume leadership positions. Civic organizing and substance abuse prevention concepts are difficult to grasp. Staff need regular training and support to develop skills and communicate concepts to others. Projects need to engage community agencies and providers while also empowering residents. Staff who can work well with residents and with agency/provider representatives Meeting times that are convenient for both residents and provider/agency representatives Atmosphere where residents and agency/provider representatives can talk openly and constructively about concerns.
PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS	
Partnership with the local police provides concrete support for coalition and safe space task force activities and strengthens relationships between residents and police. Partnership with the local school district provides valuable space for meetings and core project work. Meaningful parent involvement in schools can be achieved when the principal and other school leaders are supportive.	Projects must translate Free to Grow concepts into terms that partners/collaborators understand and relate to. Engaging partners in Free to Grow is difficult without the visible support of grantee and/or Head Start leaders. Achieving partnership and dialogue between parents and school officials is difficult when the school system is in crisis. It is difficult to build partnerships with local agencies, especially school districts, while also encouraging residents to advocate for change within these same agencies.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

is especially valuable, because it employs local residents in survey design and implementation, giving them a greater stake in Free to Grow work.

Community Voices: Still More to Do

"As parents we should be respected and not be dismissed in participating in the making of decisions. Our opinions are valid and important. We deserve support."

"Better training is needed for all school personnel on human relations, how to relate to parents."

Strong relationships with community agencies and leaders proved critical to advancing the Free to Grow agenda. Although the Compton project struggled greatly in this area, there were several notable successes. A partnership with the local police brought new services into the schools and neighborhoods and improved communication between residents and the police. Support from some local school officials was also helpful in establishing the safe space task forces and in sustaining the one task for that was more successful.

2. Key Challenges

Numerous obstacles, external and internal, limited Free to Grow's success during the pilot program (Table 5). At the community level, tensions between blacks and Latinos, along with serious performance problems within the school district, accentuated the need for staff with strong management skills who could work well with people from different backgrounds and positions of power. As in other communities where poverty and related problems have persisted for years, Compton residents are also skeptical about new programs that promise big changes. Overcoming these obstacles requires skill in building relationships at all levels, something Free to Grow project staff struggled to do and produced mixed results. Internal problems within Drew and Head Start contributed to the difficulty, as leadership changes and management problems diverted attention

from Free to Grow and made it harder for grantee managers to recognize and address Free to Grow staff weaknesses and other performance problems. Without the visible support of Drew and Head Start leadership, Free to Grow staff needed to work much harder to establish strong relationships with the schools and local Head Start centers. Morale also suffered when staff began to feel isolated from and unsupported by the larger Drew and Head Start staff community.

Although the major components of Drew's Free to Grow model meshed quite closely on paper, in practice they were not linked well during the pilot program. The parent advocate component was supposed to be the glue that connected parents with the community coalition and the safe space task forces. The youth advocates were to bring their valuable perspective to the coalition and task force work, and to help foster future community leaders. However, the project had trouble transitioning the parent advocates as envisioned to positions of real leadership within the coalition or the safe space task forces. The youth advocates did accomplish a great deal, but there was very little interaction between them and the other Free to Grow components. Project staff also had difficulty recognizing and communicating about the ways Free to Grow could help other groups advance their own agendas, and this lack of give and take contributed to weakening relationships with existing and potential partners.

3. Advice for Future Programs

Although the Drew Free to Grow project faced greater obstacles than most other programs would encounter (arising from Head Start performance problems and grantee administrative issues), valuable lessons emerged from the pilot experience. Others interested in implementing this Free to Grow model may benefit from taking the following widely applicable actions:

- Provide parents and other residents with an opportunity to take ownership of Free to Grow work.

- Give parent advocates meaningful responsibilities and allow them to assume leadership positions within the project.

- Conduct a resident-led community assessment early in the process, to identify focal areas for the community coalition and solidify resident investment in Free to Grow work.

- Use positive language to describe the program, especially in communities facing many serious problems. Residents may respond more enthusiastically when the focus is placed on "helping children" rather than on "substance abuse" or "community problems."

- Hire a project coordinator who can work well with grassroots and agency/institutional representatives, and who understands the value of delegating to other project staff and community leaders.

- Ensure that the grantee agency and Head Start program are in a position to support Free to Grow visibly and effectively. Building relationships among community partners and promoting the project within Head Start will be difficult if internal management or financial concerns consume the attention of grantee or Head Start leaders.

- Link civic organizing and community-strengthening closely to schools and Head Start centers, because this is the best way to involve parents of young children and to sustain this involvement over time.

- Integrate the youth advocates with the task forces and the community coalition, so that these other program components benefit from and provide support for substance abuse prevention activities among young people.

> *"The best thing about Free To Grow--Libres Para Crecer--that has helped get people involved, is its focus on the children, on making things better for them, and that it gives us a message on drugs, alcohol, and violence that the children can understand."*
>
> —Parent task force member

In closing, the Drew Head Start Free to Grow model provides Head Start programs a way to build on existing family-focused efforts, to bring new partners to the table, and to broaden the Head Start agenda to address concerns of school and community. Moving beyond the classroom walls, its approach recognizes

the important influence of the larger community environment on the health and well-being of children and their families.

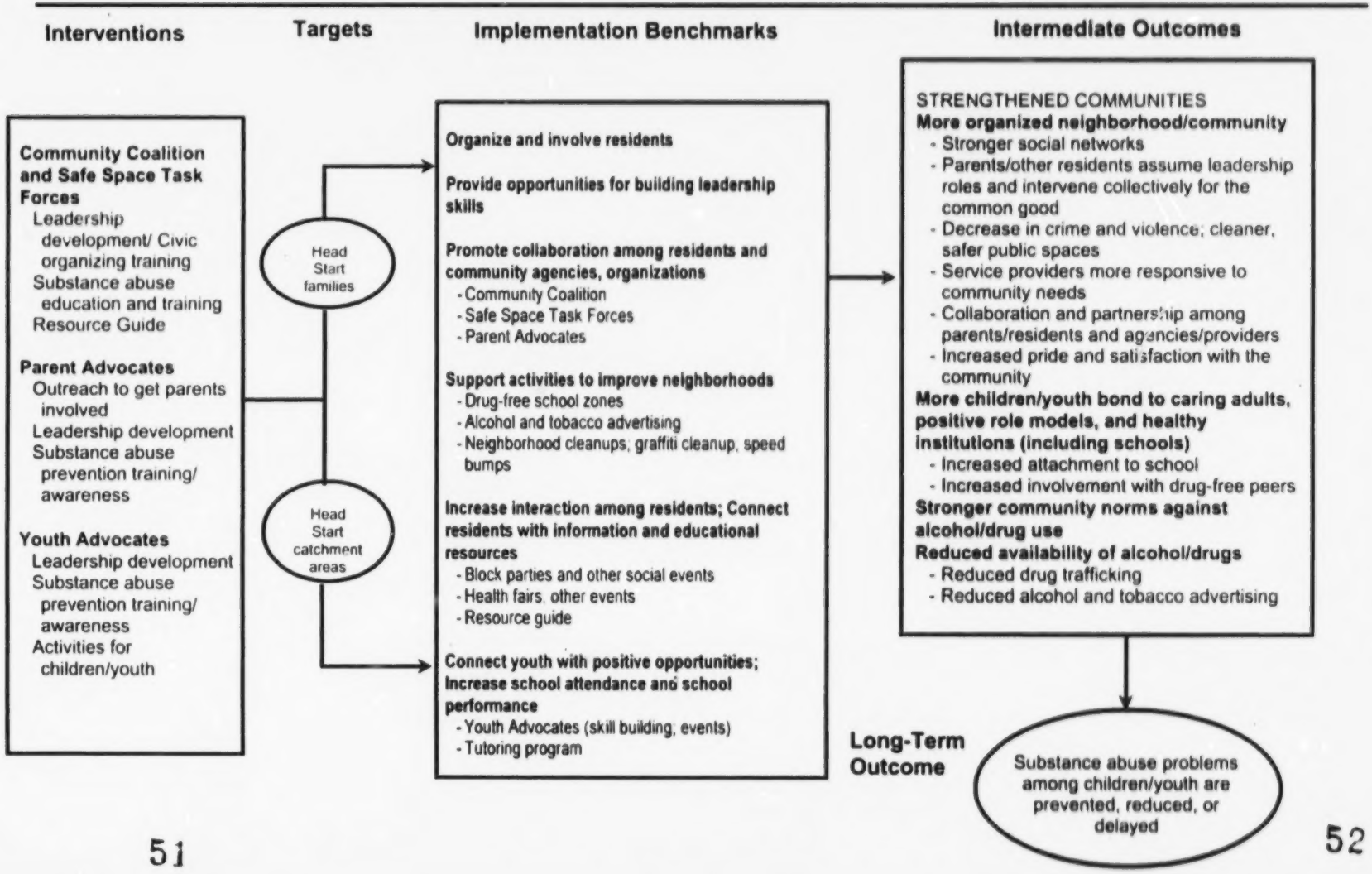
ATTACHMENT A:

A LOGIC MODEL FOR CALIFORNIA'S FREE TO GROW PROJECT

Attachment A

A LOGIC MODEL FOR CALIFORNIA'S FREE TO GROW PROJECT

Goal: prevent substance abuse problems by reducing risks and enhancing protective factors at the family and community levels


Interventions
Targets
Implementation Benchmarks
Intermediate Outcomes
Community Coalition and Safe Space Task Forces
Leadership development/ Civic organizing training
Substance abuse education and training
Resource Guide
Parent Advocates
Outreach to get parents involved
Leadership development
Substance abuse prevention training/ awareness
Youth Advocates
Leadership development
Substance abuse prevention training/ awareness
Activities for children/youth
Head Start families
Head Start catchment areas
Organize and involve residents
Provide opportunities for building leadership skills
Promote collaboration among residents and community agencies, organizations
- Community Coalition
- Safe Space Task Forces
- Parent Advocates
Support activities to improve neighborhoods
- Drug-free school zones
- Alcohol and tobacco advertising
- Neighborhood cleanups, graffiti cleanup, speed bumps
Increase interaction among residents; Connect residents with information and educational resources
- Block parties and other social events
- Health fairs, other events
- Resource guide
Connect youth with positive opportunities; Increase school attendance and school performance
- Youth Advocates (skill building; events)
- Tutoring program
STRENGTHENED COMMUNITIES
More organized neighborhood/community
- Stronger social networks
- Parents/other residents assume leadership roles and intervene collectively for the common good
- Decrease in crime and violence; cleaner, safer public spaces
- Service providers more responsive to community needs
- Collaboration and partnership among parents/residents and agencies/providers
- Increased pride and satisfaction with the community
More children/youth bond to caring adults, positive role models, and healthy institutions (including schools)
- Increased attachment to school
- Increased involvement with drug-free peers
Stronger community norms against alcohol/drug use
Reduced availability of alcohol/drugs
- Reduced drug trafficking
- Reduced alcohol and tobacco advertising
Long-Term Outcome
Substance abuse problems among children/youth are prevented, reduced, or delayed

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (3/2000)

PS 029307